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Two Points of View:--The Man of Utility and the Man of Art. *



I

UNDER the caption, "Whistler's Father," Angus Sinclair, author of the "History of the Development of the Locomotive Engine," writes to the New York "Sun" complaining that the literary world discriminates unjustly against the man of utility in favor of the man of art. In support of his contention he instances the achievements of Whistler's father as a civil engineer active in pioneer railway construction. Mr. Sinclair evidently believes that the father should be as famous as the son, whereas it is the latter who gets all the space in the encyclopædias, while the father barely is mentioned, if referred to at all.



"If fame were reckoned on the services done to the world the father in this case would be accounted a much greater man than the famous artist-son," writes Mr. Sinclair. "With your leave I shall quote

THE LOTUS two paragraphs from my own 'History of the Development of the Locomotive Engine.' To make the matter intelligible the Western Railroad mentioned was the beginning of the Boston and Albany Railroad and was chartered in 1833.

'The Western Railroad Company was fortunate at its inception in having an extraordinarily able manager in Major George W. Whistler, chief engineer, who invented constructive details as necessities arose and overcame the difficulties of a new business in a manner that greatly accelerated the completion of the enterprise. No particular seemed too insignificant to receive his masterly attention, for he not only managed the surveys and work of construction, but he organized the traffic office operations and arranged the methods of rolling stock repairs. His fame as a manager of the Western Railroad brought him a tempting offer from the Russian Government, which he accepted, and the United States lost the services of its brightest pioneer railroad engineer.

'Major Whistler was the father of James Abbott McNeill Whistler, the famous artist, who began his career as a delineator by working on

engineering drawings for his father. It is a curious comment on how the literary world discriminates between the man of utility and the man of art; that encyclopædias have extended biographies of the son, the artist, while not a word is said about the father, who organized methods and forms of railroad business that became an inheritance of the whole world and are used to-day.’ ”



II

The elder Whistler, at one time an officer in the U. S. Army, was, without doubt, a man of grit and of great ability. It is pleasant to reflect that the son showed much of the father’s spirit in his defiance of his critics and in his loyalty to his artistic ideals in which, even in the days of his greatest adversity, he never faltered. Who knows but that his intuition for “spacing,” his genius for suggesting by “arrangement” what others were obliged laboriously to indicate by the working up of numerous details, were the high artistic expression of his father’s quick grasp of diagrams and plans.

THE
LOTUS

But of the two the son is justly the one destined for fame. In the fact that, while nations are swept away, art survives, lies the hope of the world, in its evolution toward possible perfection. The locomotive, the telegraph, the telephone, the automobile, the aeroplane—what are these, but inventions of yesterday? For centuries before they were known the world was reasonably prosperous and reasonably happy without them.

It is possible to imagine a world without the things I have enumerated. It is impossible to imagine it without the Venus of Milo, the Madonnas of Raphael and, some future writer may add, "The Mother" of Whistler.

